



# *News Release*

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## **THREE MICHIGAN STUDENTS ARE 'LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE' WINNERS**

June 13, 2014

LANSING – Three students of different ages and schools, who read different books and described different influences to the authors, have one thing in common: all are Michigan winners of Letters about Literature awards.

“It is so gratifying to see students recognized for reading, writing and interacting with authors. We embrace the importance of these skills at the Michigan Department of Education, and hope every child will develop a passion for reading and find the relevance of reading to their lives,” said State Superintendent Mike Flanagan in announcing the state’s three winners with the Michigan Center for the Book (MCFB), a Library of Michigan (LM) program.

In the annual Letters about Literature contest, sponsored by the National Center for the Book, young readers write letters to authors, living or dead, describing how the authors’ work changed their lives. Students participate through classroom activities or by writing to an author on their own. The Library of Congress is the national sponsor of the Letters about Literature program.

Letters about Literature winners are:

- State Level I winner (grades 4-6) – Sylvia Fisher of St. Johns, who wrote to author Kate DiCamillo about her book, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. In her letter, Sylvia stated the author helped her understand her family’s love for her, and that the characters Abeline and Edward are good examples for kids everywhere. I am so happy I got to experience the journey that Edward took,” she said. Prize: \$250 Letters about Literature Reading Promotion Grant to St. Johns Middle School Information Center.
- State Level II winner (grades 7-8) – Nureen Zahoor of Bloomfield Hills, who wrote to author Laurie Halse Anderson about her book *Speak*. Nureen described how the book made clear to her the power of secrets and that “sometimes there are things that happen in life that you have to discuss with other people so that

they can help you.” Prize: \$250 Letters about Literature Reading Promotion Grant to the West Hills Middle School Media Center.

- State Level III winner (grades 9-12) – Nancy Huang of Lake Orion, who wrote to author Amy Tan about her book *The Joy Luck Club*. In her letter describing her family’s immigration experience, Nancy said she realized: “I wasn’t alone, that issues of identity are able to transcend generations, that my parents’ generation is not so different from my own.” Prize: \$250 Letters about Literature Reading Promotion Grant to International Academy Central Media Center.

State Finalists in the competition are:

- Isabella Kephart of Holland – Level I
- Evelyn Ugval of Grosse Pointe Farms – Level I
- Kurt Miraflor of Beverly Hills – Level I
- Maria Gerring of Parma – Level II
- Kinan Wagner of Bloomfield Hills – Level II
- Madeline Schmidt of Kalamazoo – Level II
- Kate Stanloski of Allegan – Level III
- Marissa LaPorte of Escanaba – Level III
- Ambika Vohra of Rochester Hills– Level III

"When students participate in the program, they learn about others and understand their own experiences through reading. The letters they write help them articulate that understanding and internalize the issues in the books they read," said Karren Reish, Letters about Literature coordinator. "Through these letters, we can encourage students to cultivate these deep reading skills that are key to academic and lifelong success and to help schools and libraries provide these opportunities."

Additionally, Mark Honeyman of West Hills Middle School in Bloomfield Hills School District is the 2014 Michigan Letters about Literature Teacher of the Year.

State winners receive a \$50 Schuler Books & Music gift card and \$250 Reading promotion grant for the library of their choice. State finalists receive a \$20 gift card to Schuler Books & Music. Gifts cards and grants are courtesy the Library of Congress and the MCFB.

The winners’ complete letters are available at [www.michigan.gov/youthlibraryservices](http://www.michigan.gov/youthlibraryservices).

The MCFB organizes Letters about Literature at the state level. It also encourages and produces local and statewide programs and resources that promote books, reading, authors and libraries. Funding comes solely through grants and membership dues. For more information about the MCFB, visit [www.michigan.gov/mcfb](http://www.michigan.gov/mcfb).

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The Library of Michigan – Michigan’s official state library agency for more than 175 years – is part of the Michigan Department of Education. To learn more, visit [www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan](http://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan).